

SHASHI DESHPANDE'S "STRANGERS TO OURSELVES" AS A NOVEL OF COMPLEX INEXPLICABLE MARITAL RELATIONSHIPS

P. RADHIKA¹ & K. B. GLORY²

¹Research Scholar, Department of English, K.L. University, Andhra Pradesh, India

²Assistant Professor, Research Supervisor, Department of English, K.L. University, Andhra Pradesh, India

ABSTRACT

Shashi Deshpande is a Sahitya academy award –winning Indian woman novelist. Her novels deal with the theme of marriage and marital relationships, to be true, ideally, marriage is a beautiful thing. It is a kind of friendship, an opposite sex, people with different tastes, interests, attitudes, likes, and dislikes. It plays a vital role in the life of men and woman. It is a turning point in the life of the woman. The objective of this paper is to explain the intricate and inexplicable marital relationships in the recent novel "Strangers to ourselves" (2015). Deshpande's literary world is positioned from a woman's perspectives.

KEYWORDS: *Inexplicable, Mangalsutra, Marital, Obsession, Osmosis, Patriarchy, Promiscuity, Psyche, Underpinnings, Unjust & Stash*

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INTRODUCTION

Women constituting around half of the world's population are paradoxically never treated on par with men in almost all spheres of human activity. They have been oppressed, suppressed, and marginalized in the matter of sharing the available opportunities for the fulfillment of their lives, despite the fact that every woman strives hard for the development of her family, husband and children. This is the predicament of woman all over the world.

Women have made remarkable contributions to poetry and fiction in Indian English Literature. They have not achieved any remarkable distinction in prose and drama. After the Second World War, women novelists of worth and quality began a galaxy of accomplished women novelists, whose works are now an integral part of literature. They have developed a style of their own. Each one is different from the other. Each one of them has their own world of experiences, their own way of looking at things and their own way of portraying their own characters. Their works are noticeable for the elements of nostalgia. There is also the common element of nostalgia. There is also the common element of conflict of values and a regular infighting between different ways of life- the rural and illiterate characters, and the urbane and the sophisticated and literate characters. Elements of satire and irony to be found in the works of these novelists. They evince a keen sense of awareness of social change.

SHASHI DESHPANDE'S PLACE IN INDIAN WRITING IN ENGLISH

Among the contemporary Indian writers in English, Shashi Deshpande occupies an eminent place. She has emerged as a great literary force. In her writings, she reflects a realistic picture of contemporary middle-class women. Though many women novelists portray the sufferings of women, Shashi Deshpande deals with the problems of women

in Indian scenario with a new vision. She has portrayed many modern educated and career--oriented middle-class women, who stood sensitive to the changing times and situation. In short, almost all the literary ventures of Shashi Deshpande revolve around the pathetic and the heartrending condition of women in a male-dominated society. Her novels made an outstanding contribution to Indian literature in English. They are concerned with a woman's quest for self and an exploration into the female psyche and our understandings of the mysteries of life, and the protagonists place in it. That's why her novels hold a universal recognition in world literature.

Shashi Deshpande was born on August 19, 1938 in Dharwad, Karnataka. She was the daughter of the late Adya Rangachar, better known as Sriranga, a famous Kannada playwright. His liberal attitudes had an enormous impact on her. After her schooling in Dharwad, she had her higher education in Bombay and Bangalore and obtained her post graduate degree in English from Mysore University. She married D.H.Deshpande, a professor of pathology, whose progressive outlook and unconventional ways equal to those of her father. Shashi Deshpande, authored ten novels, two novellas, 4 books for children and a large number of short stories, has been writing about the issues and the problems of middle-class Indian women caught in the trap of Indian patriarchy. Her women protagonists are the victims of unjust customs, conventions, and traditions which are in favor of men. One such protagonist is Dr. Aparna Dandekar in "Strangers to ourselves". The present paper projects the fact about the woman, who is speaking for herself about inexplicable "marital relationships" in her novel, "Strangers to ourselves".

HER VISION IN THE LATEST NOVEL 'STRANGERS TO OURSELVES'

Shashi Deshpande's latest novel "strangers to ourselves", (2015) is a love story of two persons from different fields- Dr.Aparna, an oncologist, and Srihari, a rising singer. It is, in many ways, a departure from Deshpande's earlier novels. Here the novelist ventures deeper into the territory of the mind, dismantling our comfortable notions about love and marriage. In other words, it draws us deep into the pleasures, sorrows, contradictions, and conflicts of falling in love and marrying. It moves around the theme of sex, love, and marriage.

Aparna, the protagonist of the novel tells the story of her marriage. Her first marriage is a tragic failure. A much-loved only child of her parents, she has been traumatized by a failed marriage. After she decides to end her marriage, she is a 'new' woman, wants to get rid of everything associated with it. She discards ever 'Mangalsutra' and her ring. She loses her trust in marriage and decides not to marry again. So she has vowed to remain single. Work is the perfect escape, especially for an oncologist. At a recital where Aparna lands up quite unexpectedly, she is introduced to Hari, a classically trained singer. She soaks in the magic of his music that transcends barriers and enters straight into her soul and immediately knows that he is "exceptional". He lost his mother at a young age and was raised by doting grandparents of a small town, but has no relationship with his father and stepmother. Like many upcoming artists, he is ardent about his art and striving for perfection. Aparna is impressed by the great unobtrusive sense of humility, of the maestro. A few meetings later, a last and solemn love connection ensues, and they begin to peep into each other's lives and homes, as though by 'osmosis'. Their connection deepens their frequent visits bring them emotionally and physically together.

Aparna started to view love as an exchange of power. Though she wants to love and be loved, to support and be supported by 'Hari' she flinches from intimacy. After her first marriage ended, the mere thought of living out the rest of her life with another individual made her deeply feel uneasy.

Hari is eager to marry Aparna and informs it to Aparna who trembles at the thought of getting married to him. In response to Hari's question, "will you marry me, Aparna?" she responds: "Hari, I love you and I want us to live together. I am as sure of that as I am of anything else in this life. But I am not sure about marriage" marriage makes a tight knot, marriage means expectations. We'll quarrel about money, you won't take my money, and we'll quarrel about small things. No, I don't want to go through all that again. I have lived alone for too long, Hari, I am not sure that I can live according to other's ideas" (*"Strangers to ourselves"* pg no: 251-253). She offers herself physically to him and wants to be a part of his life without marrying him. She prefers a live-in-relationship than a marital relationship. She thinks of her own idea of living with Hari- not tied the tight bond of marriage, but tied together only by love. Hari has been very uncomfortable with himself since the day of his physical relationship with Aparna. So he writes: "I am uncomfortable with myself..... I don't want you ever to think that I came to you only for sex with you, for your body, I came to you because of my love, because of my desire to express my love for you through our bodies. Your body is sacred to me (*"Strangers to ourselves"*, pg: 200). He requests her to re-think of marriage that worked, but in vain. She is ready to live with him in one home without marriage for which he is not ready. He decides to avoid a physical relationship until she decides about marriage. She thinks a lot and ultimately prepares herself to be caught in the trap of marriage.

Aparna is also disillusioned by the failed marriage of her parents, Gajanana (gavi) and Sulabha (Sulu). They were initially a happy couple loving each other intensely; meet an unhappy end when her mother leaves home never come back. She has determined to never forgive her husband who gets involved in an extramarital relationship with a singer and actress. Their marriage breaks up unexpectedly. Hari is shocked to know the story of Aparna's parents breaks up. Then Hari thinks of his grandparent's happy and peaceful marital life. They loved, cooperated and complemented each other. They have made their lives very much easier and more meaningful. They had been a happy couple since the day of their marriage.

In a sub-plot of the novel, Aparna gets involved with a patient, Jyothi at a personal level, strictly against her training and experience- oncologists tend not to have long-term patients-Aparna finds herself drawn to Jyothi. Jyothi's illnesses, the treatment of her from Aparna make Aparna a good friend. Jyothi becomes Aparna's sounding board in her confusion over her attraction to Hari. Through her association with Aparna, Jyothi gets an opportunity of a lifetime to translate a mysterious novella written out in Marathi into English that Aparna discovers among her father's stash of journals. This novella, based on a woman named Ahalya, forms a parallel plot to Aparna's narrative. The endeavor gives her a new meaning and purpose to Jyothi's life as she takes refuge in the fact that her writing will live on after her death, and she will be able to leave her everlasting stamp in the world. Despite the complex relationships between the main characters, we all have involved in many family structures in the novel with pulls and pushes balance.

The marriage of Jyothi parents was also not a happy one. It is deeply rooted in marital sex. Jyothi's father was an abominable man. He slept with her mother Prabha every night of their married life, every single night except perhaps when she had her periods. To avoid sex with her father, Prabha thought of scratching her face and spoiling her looks so that she would save herself from sex. Jyothi, an uninvolved child, defies her father whose focus was Deepak, the son of the family and the heir. Deepak marries Akash and receives a gift of marriage in the form of children. Even for jyothis, sex is a means of reconciliation between husband and wife; it is a means of bridging a growing gap between them. After her husband's death, it is difficult for Aparna to control her desire. She says," I found myself so desperate with desire. I have decided to let myself get into a relationship with an old friend. It was only for slacking my bodily desires, nothing more, but it soon

changed and I wanted a man to live with. We thought we should think of marriage at some time” (Strangers to ourselves pg. 296). Deepak, Jyothi’s brother leaves home because he cannot bear the way his father terrorized Prabha, his mother. He marries Mel, but they cannot move on with their marital life in spite of their love for each other and their love for their son. Aparna’s aunt has a son and daughter. The son’s wife was killed in the 2008 Mumbai attack on the Taj, so he has become virulently anti-Muslim and the daughter is married to a Muslim. She happily copes and becomes a part of her marital family. She believes that sex plays a vital role in keeping the marital relationship in fact. She says, “You can’t ensure your marriage against all possible problems..... Once you sleep together, everything falls into place and your relationship becomes pakka” (Strangers to ourselves, pg. 115-116). Brother refuses to see or speak to his sister later. And the mother is torn between, in Hari’s case; he has no relationship with his father and stepmother, but shares a close bond with their son, Krishna, who in turn looks to Hari as one does to an older brother.

CONCLUSIONS

So from the above study of the novel “strangers to ourselves”, it is true that marital happiness and success are abstract concepts. Their meanings change from couple to couple, person to person in this post-modern world. Happy and successful marriage is not everyone’s cup of tea. Marriage, love as well, are unhappy failures. They are brought with one or the other kind of disease or malady. The demand of the lifetime love and commitment it makes is not possible for everyone. They fail an account of various factors such as sexual promiscuity, male-ego, male-domination, women’s growing economic independence and awareness, the patriarchal attitudes to women, men’s treating women as the object of sex, lack of understanding and so on. Circumstances, too, seem to be responsible for the failure of marriages. The real marital relationship appears to be based on quality, mutual love and trust only. Shashi Deshpande’s “Strangers to ourselves” strives hard to put the lifetime of her characters under the lens and bring out the emotional grammar of their narratives as they plow through various experiences and emerge from it in this novel. It is Aparna’s spirit of obsessive reflection and self-inquiry that animates the novel, giving it the back bone of the philosophical underpinnings that make this novel well worth to read.

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